

DATE: September 15, 2006

TO: NASS Supervisors and Managers

FROM: Theresa Bailey, Performance Management Specialist  
Employee Development and Performance Recognition Staff  
Human Resources Division, AFM

SUBJECT: NASS Employee Performance Cycle Ending September 30, 2006

DUE DATES: September 22, 2006 Employee Accomplishment Reports  
October 2, 2006 Preliminary Summary Spreadsheet  
October 31, 2006 Final Performance Appraisal and Performance Award Forms

This memo describes the procedures to be used for finalizing performance appraisals and bonus awards for the performance cycle ending September 30, 2006 for NASS. Rating and reviewing officials should review this memo carefully as there are specific instructions and tight timeframes to follow.

#### **Employee Accomplishment Reports – Due to Supervisors September 22, 2006**

Upon receipt of this memo, rating officials should communicate to employees that accomplishment reports, documenting employee performance during the rating cycle, are due to supervisors on September 22, 2006. Employees need to be advised that accomplishments should be projected through the end of the rating cycle. Include accomplishments for October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2006, because the accomplishments report can also be used for a written justification in the bonus award process.

Information on how to document annual accomplishments is located on the NASSnet Performance webpage at [http://nassnet/library/info/perform\\_appraisal/index05.html](http://nassnet/library/info/perform_appraisal/index05.html). The Employee Accomplishment Report Form (435C) is also located on the NASSnet Performance webpage at [http://nassnet/library/info/perform\\_appraisal/docs/accomp\\_report\\_form.doc](http://nassnet/library/info/perform_appraisal/docs/accomp_report_form.doc).

#### **Preliminary Employee Ratings – Due to Senior Executives October 2, 2006**

As discussed in the February/March 2006 training on the new performance program, NASS will employ a Preliminary Rating Approval Process. This is a process where the tentative ratings formulated by rating and reviewing officials will undergo a Headquarters review for consistency across the Agency and comparison/evaluation to the achievement of overall Agency goals. An Excel spreadsheet must be populated by each Field Office and Branch. Summary information in the spreadsheets is to be sent to “HQ DAFO HRSO” by October 2, 2006. Spreadsheet summaries will be consolidated and presented to the Senior Executives for review and approval. More information on the spreadsheet and processing instructions will be forthcoming to your official mailbox in a separate message very soon.

Supervisors recommending Quality Step Increases (QSIs) for employees rated “Outstanding” must indicate this in the spreadsheet. QSIs are now part of the Performance Bonus System and are no

longer associated with the Awards for Excellence Program. QSIs must be approved by the Administrator. (While the tentative ratings and QSIs are being evaluated, Field Offices and Branches should be preparing the appraisal and bonus award forms for submission to the DAFO-HRSO. This will help facilitate meeting deadlines.)

Final ratings and QSI approval will be communicated by email to each Field Office and Branch after October 10, 2006, at which time, adjustments to appraisal and bonus award forms (if any) should be made, performance discussions should be held with employees, performance appraisals should be signed by employees, and all forms submitted to DAFO-HRSO as indicated below.

### **Completed Performance Appraisal and Bonus Award Forms – Due to DAFO-HRSO October 31, 2006**

- *Performance Appraisal Forms*

Performance appraisals will be documented using the NASS-435P (Performance Appraisal form) located at [http://nassnet/library/info/perform\\_appraisal/docs/emp\\_perf\\_sumry\\_f435p.doc](http://nassnet/library/info/perform_appraisal/docs/emp_perf_sumry_f435p.doc) on the NASSnet. Employee listings for each organization will be sent electronically to each Field Office and Branch soon. These listings will identify those employees who require ratings this cycle and will provide the employee information necessary to complete the upper section of each NASS-435P (Items 1-10).

The approving official for Headquarters Branch appraisals is the respective Division Director. For most Branch appraisals, the Section Head will sign in the supervisor's signature block and the Branch Chief will sign in the reviewer's signature block. Branches should obtain approving official's signature prior to submitting appraisals to DAFO-HRSO.

The approving official for Field Office appraisals is the respective FO Deputy or Associate Deputy Administrator. For most Field Office appraisals, the Deputy Director signs in the supervisor's signature block and the Director signs in reviewer's signature block. DAFO-HRSO will obtain approving official signature after appraisals are received. DAFO-HRSO will return a copy of each Field Offices' appraisals to the State Directors so copies can be made for each employee and filed in the Field Office.

Employees who have been in their positions and under performance standards for 90 calendar days or more are ratable and must receive an appraisal using the NASS-435P. The rating period for this cycle begins on the day the employee signed their performance plan in place. If an employee has not been covered under standards for the minimum appraisal period of 90 calendar days, the appraisal period for that employee should be extended to meet the 90 day requirement, at which time the employee must receive a rating of record. For questions about unusual circumstances, please contact this office for guidance. Policies regarding who is ratable and other important guidance related to the new NASS employee performance program can be found in NASS Policy & Procedure 435.2 on the HRD website at [www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/435-2-NASS.pdf](http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/435-2-NASS.pdf).

An employee's signature on the NASS-435P only constitutes receipt of the appraisal. An employee's signature on the form does not mean the employee agrees with the rating given. If

an employee chooses not to sign their appraisal, a note should be written in the employee's signature box stating, "Performance review was held on (date) and the Employee declined to sign."

In order to effectively assist an employee who receives less than fully successful summary rating within established time frames, supervisors should contact their servicing Employee Relations Specialist immediately upon making that determination.

A written narrative justification providing details concerning the employee's performance must accompany the NASS-435P to DAFO-HRSO if:

- 1) Any one "critical" element is rated Does Not Meet Fully Successful or,
- 2) The rating of record is Outstanding.

Narrative justifications may be documented on the Performance Appraisal Worksheets (Forms AD-435A and 435B), using the Form 435C, or described in a separate memo. If the rating of record is Outstanding, an employee's accomplishment report (Form 435C) will suffice as written justification.

- *Performance Bonuses and Quality Step Increases (QSIs)*

The Awards Form AD-287-2 (Recommendation and Approval of Awards) must be prepared for each bonus or QSI nomination. The Administrator will provide performance bonus amounts for "Outstanding", "Superior", and Qualifying "Fully Successful" (a bonus for Qualifying Fully Successful rating is where an employee received at least 2 appraisal points in the Exceeds column).

Bonus awards over \$500 and QSIs require a written justification. If you provide a written justification for the performance rating as indicated above, you need not provide one for the bonus award. The Human Resources Division (HRD) is requiring one justification for the performance rating/bonus award package as indicated in "Documentation to be sent to DAFO-HRSO" below. A bonus award justification may be a narrative description (achievement, role, and impact), or an employee's accomplishment report.

A QSI may be recommended only for those employees who receive an Outstanding rating, who have not received a QSI within the last 52 weeks, and who have not been promoted or reassigned to a different position since October 1, 2005. QSIs are given in the position and at the grade level for which performance was assessed. A QSI may be appropriate where outstanding performance is reasonably expected to continue in the future. QSIs to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> steps of a grade extend the employee's current within-grade waiting period by one year. For specific questions regarding QSIs, refer to your servicing Human Resources Specialist or to this office.

Additionally, a citation must be provided in Block 11 of AD-287-2 for bonus awards and QSIs. The following citation is recommended:

"This award is based upon an official performance appraisal rating of (*Fully Successful, Superior, or Outstanding*) for the rating period ending September 30, 2006."

- Documentation to be sent to DAFO-HRSO and file copies made

**Important:** Please follow these instructions carefully.

One package, to include the appraisal and bonus award, is to be received by DAFO-HRSO (ultimately forwarded to HRD) for each employee by October 31, 2006. Each employee package should contain the following and needs to be stapled together in the following order:

- 1) Original AD-287-2
- 2) Original AD-435P
- 3) Justification (Performance Rating/Bonus Award) or Employee Accomplishments
- 4) Original Performance Plan for cycle ending September 30, 2006

Paper copies of the employee's final appraisal, bonus award, and accomplishment forms, with all required signatures completed, should be sent to the supervisor for their files and a copy given to the employee.

Please do not send Individual Development Plans (IDPs), training forms, or other management documents in this package. These are not required documents in the Employee Performance File and will not be filed if received.

- Processing of Appraisal and Bonus Award forms in HRD

DAFO-HRSO will obtain Senior Executive signature on required forms, account for the performance appraisal and recognition of ratable employees and forward all forms to HRD for processing by November 3, 2006. HRD will make all bonus awards received by this date effective November 12, 2006, for payout December 7, 2006.

### **Other Reminders**

Performance plans for performance cycle beginning October 1, 2006, must be established and communicated to employees. Further guidance will be forthcoming.

Awards for Excellence nominations should be submitted as a separate package.

### **Contacts**

Questions may be referred to Theresa Bailey on 301-504-1452 or to your servicing Human Resources Specialist. Performance problems resulting in a less than fully successful rating should

be referred immediately to your servicing Employee Relations Specialist.

cc:

Metropolitan Services Branch

Employee Development and Performance

Recognition Staff